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Posted on Oct 10, 2006

By **Robert Scheer**

Well, Bush showed them, didn't he?

Over the past six years, our "my way or the highway" president blew up a crucial nonproliferation agreement which was keeping North Korea's plutonium stores under seal, ended bilateral talks with Pyongyang, squashed Japan's and South Korea's carefully constructed "sunshine policy," which was slowly drawing the bizarre Hermit Kingdom back into the light, and then took every opportunity to personally insult the country's reportedly unstable dictator because it played well politically at home.

If you shun them, they will shape up—this was the essence of President Bush's non-diplomacy, as it was in regards to Iran, Lebanon and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The result? Cold War-style brinkmanship that has left the United States helpless.

The policy options left are dumb and dumber: Either passively accept Pyongyang's defiant threats and ability to slip weapons-grade plutonium around the world, or launch an invasion that could spark a devastating attack on Seoul.

Thank you, Mr. President. I feel so much safer now that we have a wannabe cowboy in charge of the free world.

In the ongoing story of Bush and Co.'s dangerous leadership, the North Korea chapter is one of the least understood—and potentially the most disastrous. And, as with the sordid saga of Iraq and the "missing" weapons of mass destruction, the devil is in the details obscured by the ugly glare of tyrants such as Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong II.



Mike Luckovich

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Republican cheerleaders are now making the case that, as with every other problem in the world, this is all Bill Clinton's fault; the line is that former President Clinton caved to the North Korean communists, who then broke their agreements. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, what happened is that Jimmy Carter, on Clinton's behalf, had negotiated an historic deal back in 1994 to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to seal Pyongyang's plutonium in exchange for major energy assistance in the form of fuel-oil shipments and the building of safe nuclear reactors. (Incidentally, **Donald Rumsfeld was a director** of one of the companies that profited from the reactor deal.)

Clinton then followed the lead of Japan and South Korea in trying to lead paranoid North Korea into the world community through baby-step agreements. (See two great timelines [here](#) and [here](#))

Nearly a decade later, with the plutonium still safely under seal, however, Bush repudiated this approach, effectively driving North Korea to abandon all agreements and return to its pre-1994 pursuit of plutonium-based nukes. The White House rationale was that North Korea had broken the agreement by trying to enrich uranium enough to use it in weapons. However, not only are **any such intelligence claims coming from this administration now highly suspect**, but such a program would take a level of energy production and technical ability that seems to be beyond Pyongyang.

In any case, now Kim Jong II and his scientists don't have to worry about the enormous difficulties posed by enriching uranium: They have back their far, far more dangerous plutonium reserves—thanks to Bush—with enough material to make between four and 13 bombs ([see this article](#) [.pdf file])—and have missiles capable of carrying them into Alaska. Even worse, we know now that this rogue nation also benefited from key nuclear technology training provided by Pakistani nuke scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan, who then inexplicably was pardoned by our "war on terror" allies in Islamabad and has never been made available to U.S. investigators.


What did tough-talk Dubya do in response to this international outrage? He dropped the sanctions previously imposed on Pakistan because of that country's nuclear weapons program.

While there is every reason to be alarmed by North Korea's cultish police state, it is still best to pursue a realpolitik pragmatism instead of the ideological and confrontational approach Bush and his neocons have pursued for six long years now.

The North Koreans' test also underscores that nuclear proliferation is a growing menace to the survival of life on this planet, and that the menace of WMD should not have been turned into a partisan political ploy. The recklessness of this administration's foreign policy is marked by the trivialization of the WMD issue, an approach epitomized by then-Secretary of State Colin Powell's lauded (at the time) speech to the United Nations, in which he blurred the devastating consequence of a nuclear blast with the dangers of a meaningless vial of white powder.

Sensible Republicans must rein in the Bush administration and demand that progress take precedence over empty threats. They could start by listening to James Baker, secretary of state in Bush's father's administration. "I believe in talking to your enemies," Baker said a few days before the Korean nuclear test, endorsing the resumption of bilateral talks with Pyongyang and noting pointedly that he had taken 15 trips to Syria while serving Bush's father.

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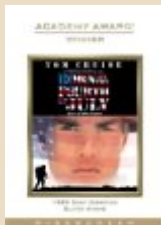
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Unfortunately, the White House will almost certainly ignore this commonsense truth. It's much easier to blame Bill Clinton.

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Comments: 9 Published. Add Yours

- Comment #28259 by Lee Driver on 10/11 at 9:34 am

Would Mrs. Bush please call her boy in, feed him an organic meal, read a little more from Huck Finn, and tuck him in. It's getting late.

It could be said he should be sent to bed with no dinner for poking a stick in that Korean boy's eye, but a little compassion can go a long way.

But tomorrow, surely tomorrow, she'll have to finally tell him he can no longer play with those older boys, Dick and Don, from down the street. Their influence has become a real problem.

- Comment #28245 by StuartH on 10/11 at 8:05 am

I sure wish that this article and the question of what caused this crisis were widely available. Mostly the press is quoting Bush or Bolton, who are blaming Clinton. NPR asked "Our UN Representative" about the assertion that this had been set off by the "axis of evil" speech and he dismissed that as simplistic.

The level of debate in the country on this subject is truly frightening. Bush is not getting any real criticism for his cowboy approach and may be looking positively decisive to many people.

The general problem here is that America is pretty ignorant about what is going on beyond US borders.

Given this, we may well see some bad results. One can imagine many scenarios for how things could get worse. Usually the way it really happens is unimaginable.

Bush is the problem in the world. The best we could hope for is that a Democratically controlled Congress limits his options so the damage he can do isn't as bad as it could be.

- Comment #28237 by Rob Schmidt on 10/11 at 7:28 am

As someone suggested recently, the Axis of Evil is kicking Bush's butt.

- Comment #28232 by Quy Tran on 10/11 at 7:23 am

At the King George dynasty's final years, its reputation touched down to bottom. Many and many Americans though they picked a wrong King and felt sorry about their huge and inexcusable mistakes (not one but twice). King George ratings sank below Nixon's and



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Carter's worst but he's still dancing around with his illusory glory and is exactly looking alike a chimpanzee in a velvet cage. All of a sudden the "Commander in Chief" has transformed into "The Commander in CHEF".

- **Comment #28227 by Quy Tran on 10/11 at 7:16 am**

At last the North Korea self-proclaimed nuclear test becomes reality. The King George policy against it will surely be the classic and outmoded ones : the sanctions. It was crystal clear that King George dynasty did not want to find a diplomatic solution to Pyongyang nuclear testings and obviously the King had ignored repeated offers by North Korea to hold talks. What hypocrisy ! King George dynasty demanded that Pyongyang have to stop all testings while he continued to expand his huge nuclear arsenal of thousands kinds of nukes. Moreover he also covered up and never mentioned about huge nuclear stockpiles of Israel kingdom. Diplomatic solution will never push the other side against the wall - especially other side is (are) Asian communists - and should know how to open several avenues to solve the problem. The outmoded sanctions will not be influential to Pyongyang government, and North Korea considers sanctions as kind of boggy, but the majority of North Koreans have to become victimized. One wise advise to King George and his inner staff that never fight with crazy nuts because they don't have anything to lose. If King George really and truly wants to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons he ought to have a correct policy that is to initiate global nuclear disarmament starting the U.S. itself then banning all nuclear arsenals in all countries, friends or foes. If King George can do that I'll vote for him this time without any hesitation. Oh, I forgot could he be applied for third term ?

- **Comment #28226 by John Earl on 10/11 at 7:03 am**

One of the culprits in this yet another Bush debacle is John Bolton. Can he remain as our spokesman at the United Nations?

- **Comment #28224 by bob choquette on 10/11 at 6:49 am**

Gee, I can't wait to see the outcome of our non-negotiations and our hardline policy towards Iran. However Iran may have an edge as their leader might read a newspaper and may have already come to the conclusion that his opponent is toothless.

- **Comment #28218 by Jane N on 10/11 at 6:03 am**

The Chinese are going to finesse this situation. Hmm, the Chinese, don't we owe them a whole lot of money? Do most Americans know that? The Chinese are much smarter than we know and they're not going to use sabers to end up the most powerful country in the world, though I wouldn't want to be on the wrong side of that government. George Bush seems like such a foolish, ignorant, vain bully, and oddly caricature like. It's hard to believe he's real. It's tragic realizing that he is.

- **Comment #28188 by Spinoza on 10/11 at 1:03 am**

Thanks Mr. Sheer for your thoughtful article. Unfortunately I saw the fascist CNN and it is totally disgusting how evil and dishonest our media is.

It is sad for the poor Korean people who have been aggressed upon by the USA terribly. It is estimated that half the population of North Korea was killed by the American war against the "commie gooks" and that not one building was left standing in all of North Korea. It was one of the most devastating bombings in history. Tons and tons of napalm were used. Tens of thousands were burnt to death. We showed no mercy. We even planned to use 30 atomic bombs on them at one point. But then again we are a good Christian Nation. The Koreans like everyone else are perfectly right to run their own country and defend it as they see fit. I don't believe in Nation- States but as long as we have them each must be treated fairly and equally. The Bushites are pure evil and they should be eliminated from the planet.

- **Comment #28173** by Sy Einstoss on 10/10 at 11:08 pm

I could visualize all the threatened third world countries seeking nuclear missiles from North Korea and the US sponsored sanctions being completely useless.

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